

# REFLECTIONS

## ON THE

### History of PASSIVE OBEDIENCE.

By SAMUEL JOHNSON.

**I**N turning over the late History of Passive Obedience, I quickly found out the Author to be a King-*James's* Man, and no King *William's* Man, (for so it is, that by means of some who pretend to be mighty Church-of-*England* Men, we have Two Kings on foot; and when a Man in common Conversation names the King, he is asked to explain himself, and to say which King he means;) And when I had discovered of what stamp the Historian was, I needed no great sagacity to understand the Design and Drift of the History. It is this plainly, to thrust out the present Government, by leaving no Room for it, and by telling us that the late Tyranny was Sacred and Irresistible; it is to keep up that Indefeasible Title, *which no Religion, no Law, no Fault nor Forfeiture can Alter or Diminish*: It is to P. 139.  
blacken all the Glorious Instruments of our Deliverance, who invited over and joined the Prince of *Orange*, with the multiplied Titles of *Rebels* and *Traitors*, and to leave them all in a *State of Damnation*, which they must get out of as well as they can; it is

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129. in short to Damn the whole Nation, both the Defenders of our Country, and the Passive-men too, the former for *Resisting*, and the latter for *not Assisting the late King*; the former as *Giants that fought against God*, and the latter as *Disloyal and Perjured Wretches* in not fighting for him: So that it calls them All to Repentance and Reparation, and is in effect a great many Sermons together upon one of their late Texts, *Why are ye the last in bringing back the King?* He when he went away left it under his Hand, That the Nation was *Poisoned*, and therefore out again comes this Historian with the old *Orvetan*, having a great number of *Probatum's* annexed to it, to try if it will prove a better Restorative, than it did a Preservative, against that venomous Doctrine, of a Nation's Defending their Rights and Liberties, and rescuing themselves from Slavery.

But the Truth and Goodness of any Doctrine is not to be tried by the telling of Noses, and therefore this History signifies as little to the *Merits of the Cause*, as if it had been the History of *Tom Thumb*, and somewhat less if it be a False History, as I shall in few words plainly shew it to be. For whereas the commendable Diligence of this Historian has made several Chapters concerning the Publick and Established Doctrine of the Church of *England*, which have not one Syllable to his purpose: At the same time he has made no mention, nor taken any notice at all of three Acts of Convocation, which are likewise Acts of Parliament in Queen *Elizabeth's* Reign, which are the Standard of the Church of *England* Doctrine in this Case. And these are back'd with three other Contemporary Acts of Parliament to the same purpose, which are full in Point to justify the late Dutch Expedition, by celebrating

brating the Religion, Justice, and Merit of three several Expeditions in those Days, which were exactly the same with this Last. I have Printed the very words of these Six Acts of Parliament four times over, once in my *Answer to Constantius*, and thrice in the *Opinion of Resistance*, which is extant p. 130, 131. of my *Collection*: And therefore the total omission of them in this History, and the passing them over in so profound a Silence, is not reconcileable with the Faithfulness required in an Historian. If he passed them over as being no fit Materials for his Passive History, but contrary to it, then I wonder very much that he should advance a Doctrine under the Name of the Church of *England*, which he knew to be opposite to Six Acts of Parliament, and to three solemn and binding Declarations of the whole Church of *England*, when he has not so much as any one Authority of the same Nature, to stand in competition with any one of those Declarations. I am perfectly weary with transcribing those Passages as they there stand, and as they are the highest Acknowledgments and Applauses of Queen *Elizabeth*, for her assisting the Scots, Dutch, and French in their several *Defences* of themselves against *Tyranny and Oppression*; and therefore I shall here only apply some of those Authentick and Act-of-Parliament Expressions to the *present Case*. If those brave Men were now alive, they would certainly be very forward in paying their *own* Deliverance-Money, when they paid six Shillings in the Pound Deliverance-Money for their *Neighbours*, and would have been very thankful to his present Majesty for using *Godly and Prudent Means* (namely, a Fleet and Army) to abate the *Hostility and Persecution practised against them*; and for his *Princely and Upright preservation of the Liberty of*

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*the Realms and Nations of England, Scotland, and Ireland from imminent Captivity and Desolation: They would have gratefully acknowledged, the great and perpetual Honour which it hath pleased God to give his Majesty, in making him the principal Support of all just and religious Causes against Usurpers. They would have said, The States of Holland are now become, in their turn, since your Majesty's happy Days, both a Port and Haven of Refuge for Distressed States and Kingdoms, and a Rock and Bulwark of Opposition against the Tyrannies and Ambitious Attempts of Mighty and Usurping Potentates.*

Now let us search this Historian's whole Pack, and see what he has got to oppose to this *publick Doctrine* of the Church of England, wherein she allowed and abetted the Subjects of three several Sovereign Princes in fighting against them, and was successful in helping two of those Countries to throw off the Yoke of their Oppressors, *Mary Queen of Scots*, and *Philip the 2d of Spain*. And upon examination, I cannot find in this whole History one Publick Act contrary to this Established Doctrine of the Church of England. There is not a word against this in the *39 Articles*, nor in the *Homilies*; for, as I have heretofore shewn, the up-shot of the Homily of Obedience is obeying *Common Authority*: And Rebellion is there defined to be *resisting or withstanding Common Authority*, and therefore I heartily subscribe the *Homilies* over again. For the difference betwixt Authority and No Authority, *Law and No Law*, though it be thought a little and a puzzling distinction by this Historian, yet I am sure is both a very clear one, and goes a great way with me. There is not a word against this in the *Liturgy*, and therefore this Historian catches at a Straw, when he says that  
God

God is stiled in it *the only Ruler of Princes*. For may I defend my self against no Man's Violence, till I can prove that I am his *Ruler*? There is not a word against this in the *Injunctions and Canons*, till you come to the Canons of Forty, which instead of being established by Act of Parliament, do stand condemn'd and reprobated by two Parliaments: No nor in the *Bishops Orders* neither, as I can see, though I have valued them the less, since I have known *the Pacquet of Advice to the Men of Shaftsbury* to have been one of those Orders. I can see nothing more which looks with any Face of a Publick Authority, unless it be the *Censures of our Universities*; but every Body knows what cheap things those are, and that an *Oxford Decree* is nothing else but a *Cambridg Address*.

As for the Martyrs and Confessors Doctrine in *Q. Mary's Time*, (which is brought in by the Head and Shoulders into this History, for it has no affinity with it) it was Submission to the Law, and not to Arbitrary Government. His Popish Bishops, *Stokesly, Tonstal, and Bonner's* Authorities I give him. Here are indeed left in this History abundance of *private Doctors Opinions*, and their flights of Flattery are very high, especially in their Court-Sermons; but these are in opposition to the Established Doctrine of the Church of *England*, and to six Acts of Parliament, as I shewed before, and therefore their Authority is worse and less than Nothing: But if they must have an Answer, they are only fit to be confuted by a Second Edition of *Dissenters Sayings*.

And here I have reason to enter a just Complaint against the pretended Church-of-*England* Men of the two last Reigns, who not only left me the grinning Honour of maintaining the Establish'd Doctrine of the

the Church all alone, (which I kept alive, till it pleased God to make it a Means of our Deliverance, with the perpetual hazard of my own Life for many Years, and with suffering Torments and Indignities worse than Death;) but also besides this, were very zealous in running me down, and very officious in degrading me, as an Apostate from the Church of *England* for this very Service: While at the same time, they themselves were making their Court with their own Renegado Doctrine of Passive Obedience; and wearing out all Pulpits with it, as if it had been, not only the First and great Commandment, but the Second too; and cramming it down the reluctant Throats of dying Patriots, as *the Terms of their Salvation*. And now in this Reign, for want of recanting their Passive Doctrine, they suffer it to be made use of against the present Government, and to be compiled into such an History as is a Seed-Plot of Rebellion, and a standing Common-place-Book for Treasonable Practices. And this is the more to be complained of, because they themselves must needs now clearly see, if they did not before, the mischievous Consequence of their Passive Doctrine, which bound us not to *Resist*, but to *Assist* our Prince, though a *Tyrant*; which if it had taken place in Mens Minds and inward Belief, had for ever enslaved the Nation. But God be thanked, though this Doctrine filled the Ears of the Nation for a long time, yet it never bored them; for if it had, the Prince of *Orange*, with all the Power of *Holland*, could never have brought us a Deliverance, nor have been able to have rescued these three Kingdoms from themselves, and from their own chosen and voluntary Bondage. And while this Doctrine continues to be believed by any deluded Party amongst us, they are bound in Conscience

science either to be doing Mischief here, or else to go and join the Irish Camp at *Drogheda*. For which Reason till it be publickly recanted or condemn'd, I shall here fully confute it in a few words.

All their Proof, that a Tyrant may not be Resisted, but must be Assisted by his Subjects, wholly centers in the 13<sup>th</sup> of the *Romans*: In order therefore to know whether a Tyrant is any way concerned, or has any part or portion in that Text, we must first consider what a Tyrant is. And because I will not be my own Judge, nor make Definitions of my own, I will take that exact one of Mr. *Abraham Cowley*, approved and published by the present Lord Bishop of *Rocheſter*. "I call him a Tyrant, who either intrudes himself forcibly in-  
"to the Government of his Fellow-Citizens, with-  
"out any legal Authority over them, or who having a  
"just Title to the Government of a People, abuses it  
"to the destruction or tormenting of them. So that  
"all Tyrants are at the same time Usurpers, either of  
"the whole, or at least of a part of that Power which  
"they assume to themselves; and no less are they to be  
"accounted Rebels, since no Man can usurp Authority  
"over others, but by rebelling against them who had  
"it before, or at least against those Laws which were  
"his Superiors.

It is plain by this Definition, that a Tyrant, (though he had a legal Title, and is a Tyrant only in Exercise, as they term it,) is both an Usurper and a Rebel; and if neither of these are contained in the Text, nor can lay any claim to the Duties of Subjection, Non-resistance, Assistance, Tribute, &c. So neither can a Tyrant who is both of them in one. As I have many Years since shewn in my *Answer to Constantius*, that the Illegal Violence of inferiour Magistrates is excluded out of  
this

this Text, by letting the Text speak for it self: so let any Man try whether the Text will admit of a Rebel or Usurper, and you may soon see how well they will become the Place. For then St. *Paul's* words run thus, *Let every Soul be subject to a Rebel,* (though he be neither higher Power, nor lower Power; nor any Power at all,) *for there is no Rebel but of God, the Rebels that be are ordained of God: Whosoever therefore resisteth a Rebel, resisteth the Ordinance of God; and they that resist, shall receive to themselves Damnation. For a Rebel is the Minister of God to thee for Good; and so is the Devil and the Inquisition.* Whereby it is demonstrable, That St. *Paul* here describes a Just and Righteous Government which is employed for the Publick Good, and requires subjection only to that; for if you put in any other into the Text, it quite overthrows it and turns it into Blasphemy: And it is likewise demonstrable, that no Tyrant can put in so much as his Nose at the 13<sup>th</sup> of the *Romans*.

The next thing is to consider whether the late King was a Tyrant or not, by this Definition. Perhaps the proving him so, will as much displease some very courtly People, as the calling a Crowned Head by that Name heretofore did; (but, God be thanked, they were so far mistaken, for he was an Uncrowned Head at that time): However pleasing and displeasing is not my Business, but doing all the Right and Service I can to my Country, and to that Just and Rightful Government which is now over us; and so that be done, I care not who is pleased or displeased. This Definition then is very full, and contains both a Tyrant in Title, and a Tyrant in Exercise, or in the Administration of the Government, as Writers of Politicks call them. The former is he, *who intrudes himself forcibly into the Govern.*

*Government of his Fellow-Citizens without any legal Authority over them.* I will not make my self more work than I need, in saying the late King was such a one, (for if I prove him One sort of Tyrant, what need I prove him Two?) but this I say, that he came into the Government against the Consent of the whole Nation; for the House of Commons, by their Bill of Exclusion, banished him 500 Miles from his Kingdom; and the House of Lords, by Bills of their own ordering, banished him 500 Miles from his Kingdom. For they ordered a Bill of an Association; a Bill for the last Parliament in being to come without his calling, and sit several Months without his leave, and to dispossess of all the Offices and places of Trust in the Kingdom; a Bill to impower the People to pursue and destroy his Forces if he raised any without consent of Parliament, and the like: whereby it appears they would trust him with nothing of the Government, but only left him an empty Crown. Now these Proceedings of both Houses did declare him to be a Publick Enemy, only with this difference, that the House of Commons were for treating him as a Foreign Enemy, and the Lords were for suffering him to be a Domestic one, and for standing upon their Guard against him. And if in the strictest Successions, (which that of England never was) Ideots and Lunaticks by common Construction have always been excepted, much more I am sure ought a known Enemy to be. But let that pass.

The latter sort of Tyrant is he, who having a just Title to the Government of a People, abuses it to the Destruction or tormenting of them. And in this sort of Tyranny the late King did so infinitely abound, that he made use of every Branch of his Authority for that

Purpose ; and it would be endless to recount the Particulars of it. His Power of raising Forces in time of War, he perverted into a standing Army in time of Peace ; his Power of making Protestant Officers throughout the Kingdom, he applied to the making of Popish, and thereby put our Lives and Liberties into the Hands of our Enemies ; by his Power of making Judges, he got the Dispensing Power, to the Destruction of our Laws, which is the wholesale destruction of a Nation. As for his Tormenting part, that is best understood by those whom he had gotten in great numbers piled up in Jails like Faggots, and were otherwise ruined and barbarously used, who still feel it in their surviving Miseries ; but so far as my share was in it, God forgive him for it, for I heartily do. I cannot omit his Dropping some parcels of this Tyranny when the Prince of *Orange* was coming over, as Men do their stolen Goods when they are in danger of being seized with them, (which put the Prince upon a necessity of an additional Declaration to his First) because this is a very plain Acknowledgment of the thing I was proving. For why were the Charters restored to all Corporations, and *Magdalen-Colledg* to the right Owners, and the High Commission (which was the very Tyranny and Usurpation of the Popes of *Rome*, only brought to *White-hall*, and so much the worse by being nearer us) ; why was this dissolved, and the Seal broken ; I say, why were all these things Dropt if they had not been purloined, or if any King of *England* could have justified the keeping of them ?

That which follows is the closest inference that can be. So that all Tyrants are at the same time Usurpers, either of the whole (which is the case of a Tyrant in Title) or at least of a Part of that Power which they assume to themselves ; which is the Case of

a Tyrant in Exercise. For all the Power which the Law does not give a Prince, (which is both the Foundation, and the Measure, and the Rule of a Prince's Authority) is assumed and usurped; it is without Law, beyond Law, and against the Intention of the Law: And therefore it is not the Power of an English King, which, as Chancellor *Fortescue* says, he receiveth from the People, for their better Protection, and cannot govern them by any other Power; but it is an Arbitrary and boundless Power, which he gives to himself, and uses as he pleases to the Peoples destruction. And such in every respect was the late King's High Commission Court.

The last Clause is this. *And no less are they to be accounted Rebels, since no Man can usurp Authority over others, but by rebelling against them who had it before, or at least against those Laws which were his Superiors.* I need not exemplify this in the Dispensing Power, which was an open Invasion of the Legislative, and a Rebellion against them who have always had an Unquestionable Right in that Sovereign Authority. And as for his Superiours, the Laws, (which the same Laws tell us more than forty times the King is under, and subject to,) he made more bold with them, than any King of *England* ever did in so short a time.

Here then I fix my foot, and will maintain it against all the Champions of the Passive Doctrine, That the late King for many Years past has had no Right at all to the Duties enjoined by *St. Paul* in the 13th of the *Romans*, and that he has been an out-cast from that Text ever since he was an out-law to the English Constitution; That from the Time he turned aside to a course of Injustice, he has not been the *Minister of God*, but as *Bracton* expressly says, the Minister of the Devil; nor has he been one of *St. Paul's higher Powers*, for the Power of a King of *England* is *potestas juris, non injuria*, a Power of doing Right, not of doing Wrong; and consequently there was not a *Soul* Subject to him, or that owed him *Non-resistance*; That he was so far from being the *Ordinance of God*, that he dissipated and destroyed that *Ordinance*, which is the Legal Constitution, as *Melancthon* truly affirms; And lastly, that all this while amongst his other Usurpations, he usurped the Name of a King which did not belong to him: for governing by Law is the Essence of an English King, and where there is Arbitrary Government, there is no King, says *Bracton*; He loses the Name of a King, says the

the 17th Chapter of the Laws of King *Edward the Confessor*.

It cannot be said that I write these things to serve a present Turn, because I have long since demonstrated all this, and all that I hold in Politicks beside; and because it is Demonstration all that I ever will hold, in one single Sheet of Paper which was commonly called the *Chapters*, and is extant, P. 88. of my Collection: But I am forced to repeat these Truths over again, because I see the Passive-Men will never have done, for when all their Arguments are baffled, still their Doctrine will serve to make a History. I humbly leave it to the Legislative to put a stop to the Continuation of this History, because they are most concern'd to do it; for if there be no difference betwixt Law, and no Law, in the point of the People of *England's* subjection, then they may even shut up their two Houses at *Westminster*, and save themselves the needless trouble of all their publick Consultations. And while the Passive Doctrine remains, all the Lords and Commons of *England* have no other *Property* in their Lives, Liberties, and Estates, than the Duke of *Lorraine* would have had in his Country, with the French King's four High-ways of a quarter of a Mile broad quite through it. For it is the very Doctrine of the Bowstring, or of the *Goal and Block*, as this History describes it, P. 126. or of the Halter, for I will never contend about Names, but in short it makes Slaves, and Sacrifices of a whole Nation, whenever a Tyrant comes that will take the advantage of it, and exercise the *Rights of a King*, p. 88. Now we are taught in this History, *That in such cases a Nation ought to call upon God*, p. 129. which is a Cheat of a Remedy; for God has expressly said, *that he will not Hear in that Case*, *1 Sam. 8. 18.* but if Men will have an Oppressor, leaves them to abide by their own Folly and Madnes.

As to the Observations upon my Preface to the Remarks upon Dr. *Sherlock's* Book, I shall say but this, That if that Preface be so weakly written, as to be overthrown by such empty Observations, and such impotent Reflections as those are, let it take its chance.

As to Bishop *Lake's* Legacy, I shall only say this, That if Passive Obedience be the Characteristick of the Church, then those Confessors who in *Q. Elizabeth's* Time restored and established the Church, were not of it.

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